STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMISSION
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May 28, 2005

TO: **Washington Traffic Safety Commission**
Traffic Records Oversight Committee

FROM: **Washington Traffic Records Committee**

RE: **TraCS National Model and Washington**

Washington's Traffic Records Committee (TRC) serves as a state and local stakeholder forum with representatives from the transportation, law enforcement, criminal justice, and health professions. This multi-agency coalition seeks to develop strategies and implement projects across multiple agencies to create a more efficient system for the collection, dissemination, and use of traffic related information. Ultimately, Washington's TRC seeks to improve public safety by providing more timely, accurate, uniform, and accessible traffic records data.

Primary among the projects currently underway is the acquisition of a software application to enable law enforcement agencies statewide to issue citations and create collision reports electronically. The TRC has been engaged in an extensive review process to assess the advantages and disadvantages of various industry alternatives.

As part of this review process, in October 2004, the TRC sent four representatives to the semi-annual Traffic and Criminal Software (TraCS) National Model Steering Committee meeting. Chris Madill, Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC), Marlene Boisvert, Washington State Patrol (WSP), Randy McKown, Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), and Paul Sullivan, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) represented the state's interests in high-level discussions concerning the future of the TraCS application.

TraCS is a data collection and reporting tool that runs on in-vehicle or office computers to allow enforcement personnel to prepare collision reports and other selected forms electronically. The application was originally developed by the Iowa Department of Transportation with funding assistance from several federal agencies. As a result, TraCS emerged as a freeware solution offered to states through a uniform license agreement.

In 2003, the Washington State Patrol and the Administrative Office of the Courts conducted the eCitation Pilot Test utilizing the TraCS software. This pilot project demonstrated the feasibility of issuing electronic citations and revealed several issues regarding the usability of the software. Officers noted that various "Windows-based" functions common to regularly used applications were not available in TraCS. Feedback also showed aversion to the data bar concept, a key user interface feature of TraCS. The data bar is a fixed entry field at the top of the screen where all information is entered. This concept is contrary to most electronic forms in which an individual tabs through various fields throughout the screen.

In addition to the concerns expressed by officers, a number of critical technical issues emerged. The application was written in Visual Basic 6.0 (VB 6). VB 6 is an aging environment and Microsoft Corp. has announced its intention to discontinue providing support in 2005. WSP, WSDOT, and the Department of Licensing (DOL) are migrating to the .NET (dot-net) framework. AOC is also rewriting their systems using the J2EE standard. Both J2EE and .NET represent current industry architecture standards and will be supported by Microsoft Corp. and Sun Microsystems for the foreseeable future. Both are open architecture technologies providing more flexible and scalable platforms and enhanced interoperability for future data integration projects.

Participating agencies have expressed hesitancy in implementing technology based on a dated architecture with diminishing support from its developer. The likelihood of unforeseen risks due to the migration of these agencies to more current architectures precludes the ability to utilize the current version of TraCS. The issue of rewriting the application was raised at the National Model Steering Committee meeting in October 2004. While the Committee acknowledged a need to eventually rewrite TraCS, no decision was made and the issue remains under review. Indications were that given funding constraints and the staff limitations of the TraCS developer, a release of a rewritten application would not be likely until early 2008. Such a delay presents additional risk to ongoing projects and lengthens the life of the inefficiencies of current paper-based systems.

Apart from user and technical issues is a concern regarding the governance structure of the National Model Steering Committee. Several discussions at October's meeting led to natural decision points requiring resolution. The absence of a defined decision-making process hindered the ability to reach consensus at these decision points. Other discussions about proposed modifications to the TraCS application and the process of prioritizing these proposals remained unsettled. The inherent difficulties of managing the National Model through a multi-state governing body could be minimized by more clearly defining roles for participating states and establishing explicit prioritization and decision-making procedures.

The TraCS application helped pioneer the concept of electronic data collection for law enforcement. Funding primarily from federal sources has created a low-cost solution capable of meeting the requirements of many states. However, the TraCS application should not be considered a blanket solution suited to satisfy the technical and functional requirements of every state.

As a result of Washington's technical infrastructure and identified requirements, the TRC has opted to pursue alternative solutions by requesting proposals from commercial providers. This option has recently become more feasible due to an increase in providers in the marketplace and a resulting decrease in procurement costs for such applications. Several state agencies have committed to leveraging internal resources, outside of federal funds, in the development and acquisition of an application tailored to the state. The agencies will acquire the source code to the application in order to minimize recurring service costs and maximize flexibility in implementation and maintenance. In consideration of the requirements brought forward by participating agencies and upon conclusion of the review of industry alternatives, the TRC believes this to be the most suitable course of action to serve the long-term needs of the state.